

**AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN OF BEST PRACTICES IN
SUPPORTING PERSISTENT YOUTH OFFENDERS IN THE
TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to understand how persistent youth offenders in Alberta can be best supported as they transition into adulthood. In addition, this report intended to name best and promising practices in North America and internationally by considering programs and services that address the risk factors and needs that a persistent youth offender faces during the transition age. The objectives of this project were to:

- (1) Establish an understanding of the risk factors present among persistent youth offenders as they transition to adulthood;
- (2) Establish an understanding of the needs of persistent youth offenders as they transition to adulthood; and
- (3) Determine best practice in supporting persistent youth offenders as they transition to adulthood.

In order to address these objectives, two research methodologies were employed. First, a literature review was conducted to establish the risk factors present among persistent youth offenders in their transition to adulthood, as well as their specific needs during this time. Second, an environmental scan was conducted in North America and internationally to identify best and promising practices that support persistent, transition-aged youth offenders as they progress into adulthood.

Discussion

The data collected were used to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are some of the specific risk factors present among persistent youth offenders as they transition from youth to adulthood, as identified in the literature (e.g., poverty, mental health, education, employment, addiction, etc.)?
- (2) What specific needs have been identified for transition-aged persistent youth offenders?
- (3) What programs and services are available in Alberta, Canada, and internationally to support persistent youth offenders in the transition to adulthood?
- (4) What best practices have been identified from evaluations of these programs?

The transition into adulthood is a challenging time for all adolescents and is especially difficult for those youth who do not benefit from a positive and supportive environment. As Uggen and Wakefield (2005) explain, youth who have been involved in the criminal justice system and lack support are more likely to face a “cumulative

disadvantage” due to additional challenges such as poverty, homelessness, mental illness, and substance abuse.

Risk factors for persistent youth offenders can be categorized into five domains: community, family, individual, school (employment), and peer. As shown throughout the literature, factors in each of these domains must be addressed in order for persistent youth offenders to be fully supported during their transition and their needs to be met. Inderbitzin (2009) and Uggen and Wakefield (2005) argue that risk factors in one of these domains tend to impact or cause issues within other domains. For example, coming from or returning to a disorganized neighborhood with high rates of poverty and crime not only increases the likelihood of recidivism, but also leads to a lack of education, and thus, impacts occupational attainment (Uggen & Wakefield, 2005).

Altschuler (2005) adds family and social involvement to the list of important risk factors that must be addressed for these youth offenders. He states that problems within the family can often lead to poor youth development – an issue which can also impact education, employment, and eventually, income. Inderbitzin (2009), Cuzick et al. (2011), and Osgood et al. (2005) also emphasize that mental illness, lack of positive relationships, and poor socioeconomic backgrounds must be addressed, and suggest that promising support programs should include elements to address all of these diverse issues.

The needs of the persistent youth offender stem directly from the common risk factors discussed above. Reid and Dudding (2006) have established eight key areas in which youth need support in order to achieve success, with the foundation being financial support: without this foundation, many needs would be more difficult or nearly impossible to address. Once financial support is achieved as a foundation, promising programs should aim to support youth in areas of education, housing, life skills, identity, youth engagement, emotional healing, and relationships. Ideally, programs that address these areas would best support the persistent youth offender to be successful.

The environmental scan identified 18 programs and services that are available for persistent youth offenders as they transition into adulthood. Nine of these programs were labeled as targeted programs – programs that directly target this population. Eight targeted programs were classified as wrap-around services and one program offered both wrap-around and specialized services. Another nine programs were listed as general programs – programs that were not necessarily designated for youth offenders, but address the risk factors they experience. Five of these programs offered specialized services, two offered wrap-around services, and two offered both service types. The majority of programs (14 in total) were found in Canada, however, there were also two American programs, one Australian program, and one in the United Kingdom. These programs were included within the scan because they address all or some of the risk factors and needs identified in the literature review.

Program evaluations aid in establishing best practice as they provide evidence that the program is successful in its implementation and outcomes. The evaluations

available for the City of Calgary ISSO Initiative, the “Inside the Walls” YOUCAN project, and the Transition 2 Adulthood (T2A) trust program provided evidence of each programs’ success. Each of these programs provides wrap-around services to youth offenders and focus on the individual needs of each young person. These programs have demonstrated success by the high number of youth who are able to successfully complete the programming and come closer to achieving their individual goals. The City of Calgary ISSO Initiative, the “Inside the Walls” YOUCAN project, and the T2A trust program assist youth in obtaining the proper life skills and education to achieve individual success. In addition, the ISSO Initiative and the T2A program both focus intensively on ensuring continuity of care and the coordination of services to help youth meet their long-term needs.

Of the remaining programs found by the environmental scan, few have conducted program evaluations, making it difficult to definitively conclude that they demonstrate best practice. However, based on the information provided by the literature review, some programs show promising practice by addressing the risk factors and needs faced by persistent youth offenders.

Continuity of care and coordination of services have been identified as important for persistent youth offenders as they transition into adulthood. While continuity of care is a common characteristic among many of the targeted programs in this study, the Youthful Offender Transition Program (YOTP) and the Elizabeth Fry Follow-up and Attendance Centre are two programs that also cater their services to range of risk factors. These programs address a diverse set of issues, including mental health, life and job skills, and meaningful employment. The individual programming that is created to address the unique needs and barriers of the young person is an important practice that both of these programs employ.

As described in the literature review, risk factors within one domain of a young persons’ life can cause or impact issues in other domains (Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). Due to this “chain reaction,” programs that address the underlying issues surrounding basic needs may be identified as promising practices. The John Howard Society’s C-STEP program and McMan Youth, Family and Community Services have both established holistic programs that focus not only on employment and independent living, but also on the issues that have previously prevented success in these areas. The case-by-case method used by these programs to help persistent youth offenders contributes to the longevity of their success during and after their transition to adulthood.

Social inclusion and recognition of culturally specific barriers and solutions have also been identified as important practices in managing the transition to adulthood for persistent youth offenders. The Ge-Da-Gi-Binez Youth Centre focuses on traditional aboriginal teachings to address specific risk factors and encourage positive reintegration and transition after release from custody. This culturally specific program demonstrates promising practice by providing wrap-around services that are tailored to meet the needs of its target population.

The literature suggests that promising practices would address each of the five risk factor domains (community, family, individual, school/employment, and peer) within their programming. Marist Youth Care in Australia comes close to addressing needs within each domain with the wide variety of services available. Programs at Marist focus on employment, housing, addictions, family integration/support, and provide continuity of care throughout the transition. This continuous, coordinated range of service is vital to successful transition.

While many of the programs included in the environmental scan are relevant to the current study and do address some of the needs and issues faced by youth offenders, too few of them offer wrap-around services and some only work with youth until they turn 18. Because this time of transition is accompanied by many challenges, and because many youth are dealing with complex issues without the continued support of government services, it is important for programs to address all needs and to provide continuous support well into adulthood.

A few additional issues can be identified in relation to the programs available to the population in this study. While many programs cater to at-risk populations, few of them were established specifically for persistent youth offenders as they transition into adulthood. Given the unique challenges that define this population, targeted programs are necessary to provide the support needed. The environmental scan did find programs that were newly created for this population, however; their lack of evaluations proved to hinder the determination of best practice.

Conclusion

As evident within the literature review and the program evaluations available, best practices must employ a holistic approach to address all needs and issues faced by a persistent youth offender. Programs that neglect an area of need are not likely to see sustained achievement in the youth they work with because of the impact one issue may have on many others. Programs that demonstrate continuity of care have shown success and promise as they help instill stability and long-term support through the transition to adulthood. However, future research should look at the effectiveness of these promising programs as many of them are currently in their initial stages and have not conducted evaluations to measure their success.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Recent studies measuring the effectiveness of early prevention and intervention practices on offending rates have been at the forefront of research within youth justice in Canada. Results of many of these studies have influenced the need for further research in the area of persistent youth offenders and the issues and needs they are faced with as they transition out of the youth justice system and into adulthood. The transition into adulthood is a critical time for all adolescents that starts, on average, at age 18 and can last until their early 30s (Clark, 2007). During this time, many adolescents utilize the support that their families provide (Reid & Dudding, 2006). There is a critical need to examine the impact of transition on persistent youth offenders, as they often transition into adulthood without comparable access to stable and positive support.

The purpose of this report is to understand how persistent youth offenders in Alberta may be best supported as they transition into adulthood. Youth who are classified as persistent offenders have been defined as having “five or more substantive (i.e., *Criminal Code*; *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*) offences or incidents of which he/she has been found guilty in youth court (with no subsequent charges pending)” (MacRae, Bertrand, Paetsch, Hornick & DeGusti, 2009:4). As discussed by DeGusti, MacRae, Vallee, Caputo & Hornick (2009), persistent youth offenders are also characterized by their tendency to not respond to formal social control. As a result, persistent youth offenders often continue their offending behaviour into adulthood.

Thus, the objectives of this project are to:

- (1) Establish an understanding of the risk factors present among persistent youth offenders as they transition to adulthood;
- (2) Establish an understanding of the specific needs of persistent youth offenders as they transition to adulthood; and
- (3) Determine best practice in supporting persistent youth offenders as they transition to adulthood.

1.2 Methodology

In order to address these objectives, two research methodologies were employed. First, a literature review was conducted to establish the risk factors present among persistent youth offenders in their transition to adulthood, as well as their specific needs during this time. Second, an environmental scan was conducted in North America and internationally to identify best and promising practices that support persistent, transition-aged youth offenders as they progress into adulthood.

The following questions guided the research:

- (1) What are some of the specific risk factors present among persistent youth offenders as they transition from youth to adulthood, as identified in the literature (e.g., poverty, mental health, education, employment, addiction, etc.)?
- (2) What specific needs have been identified for transition-aged persistent youth offenders?
- (3) What programs and services are available in Alberta, Canada, and internationally to support persistent youth offenders in the transition to adulthood?
- (4) What best practices have been identified from evaluations of these programs?

1.2.1 Literature Review

The literature review was intended to outline the risk factors present among persistent youth offenders during their transition into adulthood, along with the needs that must be addressed in order for programs and supports to be effective and encourage successful transitions. The review utilized both grey and academic literature.

1.2.2 Environmental Scan

The environmental scan was conducted to discover available programs and services that support persistent youth offenders as they transition into adulthood. The scan was not intended to be exhaustive but rather to provide an overview of relevant and valuable promising practice programs and services across Canada and internationally. In Canada, the scan included a search of national agencies as well as a search by province/territory. In the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, the scan included a search of national agencies, however, specific programs were included as program examples.

1.3 Organization of the Report

Chapter 2.0 presents findings from the literature review on the challenges faced by persistent youth offenders as they transition into adulthood. Chapter 3.0 presents findings from the environmental scan of programs and services available to transition-aged persistent youth offenders to provide support and address the young person's needs. The final chapter discusses the findings of both the literature review and the environmental scan and outlines best practices based on evaluations.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The transition into adulthood is a critical time for adolescents and is taking longer than it has in the past (Clark, 2007). Though many young adults depend on family and parental support during this time, disadvantaged youth often lack these supports and are therefore faced with additional challenges such as homelessness, poverty, and possible involvement with the justice system (Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). By identifying the risk factors and specific needs of persistent youth offenders, programs and services can be established to best meet those needs and provide opportunities for a healthy and positive transition into adulthood.

2.2 Risk Factors Among Persistent Youth Offenders During the Transition to Adulthood

The literature (e.g., Uggen & Wakefield, 2005) suggests that youth offenders face a cumulative disadvantage as they transition into adulthood. Cumulative disadvantage refers to the accumulation of multiple barriers to success – for example, unemployment, poverty, and mental health issues. Many of these barriers or issues can be identified before, during, and after involvement with the justice system. This highlights the additional difficulties that persistent youth offenders face in an already complicated time in their lives (Uggen & Wakefield, 2005).

Many youth offenders enter the justice system from “disorganized neighbourhoods” defined by high levels of poverty and incarceration rates, few legitimate employment opportunities, and poor support resources within them (Chung, Little & Steinberg, 2005; Inderbitzin, 2009; Perkins-Dock, 2001; Trulson, Marquart, Mullings & Caeti, 2005; Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). Uggen and Wakefield (2005) highlight the concern that these early disadvantages impact educational and occupational attainment, increasing the likelihood of criminal involvement. Youth offenders may return to these neighbourhoods after incarceration and are forced to face the negative stigma that accompanies a criminal record (Altschuler, 2005; Chung et al., 2005; Inderbitzin, 2009; Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). The negative lens through which many in the community view youth offenders proves to be a detriment in terms of finding employment, accessing services, and maintaining important family relationships (Altschuler, 2005; Chung et al., 2005, Inderbitzin, 2009; Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). As Inderbitzin states, “youth returning to their homes...bring with them track records of failure” (2009:455). This “track record” is often accompanied by a serious lack of positive support from family and peer groups as they transition to adulthood.

Altschuler (2005) explains the importance of family and social involvement in the context of continuity of care. In order to establish continuity within the social environment of the young person, the level and constructiveness of family involvement is a key element for rehabilitation. Chung et al. (2005) adds that those youth with poor

family and social relationships often lack the support and resources necessary to deal with the hardships of transition. In addition, problems within the family are often correlated with poor youth development (Chung et al., 2005). An unsupportive relationship within the family can lead to highly delinquent and antisocial behaviour and can increase the already heavy burden of transitioning into adulthood (Inderbitzin, 2009; Perkins-Dock, 2001). As Perkins-Dock explains, “families typically view the problem not from a family perspective but as a problem of the delinquent youth,” which may lead to isolation of the young person (2001:615).

Youth who have grown up in the child welfare system deal with a unique set of challenges as they “face a lack of family and support services” (Inderbitzin, 2009:455). The lack of services provided to those youth who have “aged out” of the system forces these youth to “face these challenges with virtually no preparation and no idea what to expect as ‘the state has largely abandoned its role in... reintegration’” (Inderbitzin, 2009:455). As a result, youth who cannot return to their families and have no means of support encounter unique challenges as they turn the age of majority, such as finding legitimate housing (Inderbitzin, 2009).

Many young offenders enter the justice system with mental health issues and special educational needs, both of which tend to significantly impact the rate of reoffending upon release from custody, and ultimately, as they become adults (Cuzick, Courtney, Havlicek & Hess, 2011; Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005; Trulson et al., 2005). Mental health includes not only disorders such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), but also issues such as substance abuse, addictions, and depression (Chung et al., 2005). The literature suggests that youth who are faced with these problems can have “significant developmental challenges during the transition to adulthood” as a result (Chung et al., 2005:71).

The literature highlights another common trend in the issues faced by persistent youth offenders in their transition to adulthood. The poor socioeconomic backgrounds of many of these youth start a movement toward low levels of employment and inadequate income – possibly leading to reoffending (Chung et al., 2005). The stigma of incarceration coupled with the lack of education and job experience can often leave the transitioning youth with few employment options and little access to resources that can help them find gainful employment (Inderbitzin, 2009).

The 2001 Canadian Census results suggest that the transition into adulthood is taking longer for both the general population of youth and for youth transitioning out of care and into the community (Clark, 2007). Clark (2007) illustrates this extension of transition by stating that young adults aged 30 years old in 2001 were at the same point of transition as 25 year olds in 1971. This elongation of the transition period as well as the need to provide appropriate resources to adolescents throughout the entire transition period are common themes which link the issues previously discussed. This process of support through transition may be taking longer than it did in the past, but in order to maintain continuity of support and help youth achieve individual success

throughout their transition, more attention must be focused around limiting the *cumulative disadvantage* faced by these transitioning youth offenders.

Persistent youth offenders face a complex set of issues that often cannot be resolved before they reach adulthood. Continuity of care throughout the transition age ensures a seamless provision of services during this critical stage, when government and community resources are often discontinued once a youth reaches the age of majority. As Osgood and colleagues observe, “once these individuals are no longer children, the state assumes less responsibility for them... [with many] professionals (un)trained to be attentive to the needs, competencies, and desires of young people at the brink of adulthood” (2005:10). Additionally, once a youth is released from custody, they are faced with many new and unknown challenges and responsibilities with no safety net to help them succeed (Inderbitzin, 2009:455). Typically these responsibilities are gradually introduced to an adolescent throughout their transition into adulthood; most often, youth are not expected to take on complete adult responsibilities the day they turn the age of majority. As Chung et al. (2005) outline, the support of government resources should not be withdrawn on the day the youth reaches the age of majority but rather be provided until they reach a level of adequate maturity to achieve independence.

2.3 Needs of Persistent Youth Offenders in the Transition to Adulthood

The risk factors present among persistent youth offenders in the transition to adulthood lead to a number of unique needs that must be addressed in developing best practice supports and services. Current literature points to a number of needs among youth offenders that, if addressed, would increase success in the transition to adulthood.

Reid and Dudding (2006) have established eight areas in which youth need support to achieve success in the transition to adulthood. Based on a foundation of financial support, education, housing, life skills, identity, youth engagement, emotional healing, and relationships are considered to be the key areas of need for adolescents as they grow into adulthood. Within their research, Reid and Dudding stress the importance of the term “interdependency” as opposed to “independence” when referring to the final goal of transition. While independence is a positive outcome, it is suggested that true success can only be achieved when the relationships and supports of a youth’s life are connected and not independent of one another (Reid & Dudding, 2006).

Thus, the collaboration of the services dealing first hand with youth offenders transitioning into adulthood is key to successful outcomes. The Federal Department of Justice explained that “cooperative approaches to youth justice issues involving families, communities... mental health and child welfare support can encourage young people to avoid and overcome criminality” (Department of Justice, 2009:3). With that said, the literature highlights that youth are often involved with a number of systems and agencies at the same time; as a result, services aimed at this vulnerable population

must understand the importance of their cross-sectoral involvement. Mann, Senn, Girard and Ackbar's (2007) article on Ontario interventions reinforces this claim, supporting the federal government's call to action for a "holistic" program approach that creates partnerships among agencies to ensure long-term success.

Research has commonly found that a major need among youth transitioning to adulthood is having a positive adult mentor in their life (Smith, Peled, Leadbeater, & Clark, 2010). Cuzick and colleagues use Social Bond Theory to explain the need for positive adult attachment: "attachments to adults and commitment to and involvement with conventional social institutions reduce crime and delinquency by acting as agents of informal social control" (2011:5). Chung et al. (2005) explain that in order for youth to have successful transitions to adulthood, they need to achieve strong psychosocial development; one way to achieve this is to establish positive adult and peer relationships. Fostering any existing positive familial or adult relationships while in custody is particularly important for a smooth transition back into the community for youth who have been incarcerated (Dubberley, 2006; Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). These relationships also help the youth offender make connections with the outside world that will prove to be positive during the time of transition, and reduce the risk of reoffending. In general, Altschuler (2005) advises that social inclusion is very important for transition. Social participation can help build and maintain resilience, which could lead to a healthy transition to adulthood by encouraging pro-social, legitimate, and constructive behaviour.

As discussed above, the collaboration of services cannot be overlooked. The disconnect between mental health services provided by the justice system, child welfare, private and public hospitals, and the educational system is causing a fragmented, disorganized and inadequate response system (Lyons & Melton, 2005). In one study, it was found that the majority of youth offenders diagnosed with a mental illness also struggled with "aggression, substance misuse, self-harm, and social, family, and educational problems" (Bailey, 2003:583). It was also found that the development of multi-agency health care, justice, and education teams not only helps in reducing recidivism but also ensure appropriate adolescent mental health services. With that in mind, it would be beneficial for mental health needs to be addressed during pre-release planning to ensure continuity of services during transition and to foster success in other areas such as education and employment.

Once mental health issues have been addressed, needs such as employment, job training, and housing can take priority. In a list of the top ten areas of concern for youth as they neared their transition into adulthood, independent living, education and training, and employment were among those identified by vulnerable Canadian youth (Smith et al., 2010). Employment, education and training, and housing are interrelated, all requiring attention to ensure the necessary supports for a successful transition to adulthood (Reid & Dudding, 2006). Inderbitzin (2009), among others (Cuzick et al., 2011; Trulson et al., 2005; Uggen & Wakefield, 2005) suggest that increasing the basic education, job training and vocational opportunities of offenders may translate into better employment opportunities and, in turn, better living and housing

accommodations. In addition to basic employability skills, youth offenders must also learn skills such as work ethic, résumé writing, interview skills and, most importantly, the self-discipline to apply for a job and commit to it (Trulson et al., 2005). Due to the importance and difficulty of achievement in these areas, setting up stable housing and employment should be done as part of pre-release programming for these youth (Inderbitzin, 2009; Osgood et al., 2005). In order to encourage further success for those being released from custody, Inderbitzin suggests that transitional sentencing programs should be better utilized to allow offenders to find a stable job and start saving money for the transition into their new lives while finishing their sentences in group homes (2009:472).

2.4 Summary

Though there are a multitude of risk factors present among persistent youth offenders as they prepare for the transition into adulthood, as well as many needs that must be met to enable a healthy transition, there are three criteria that have been identified for a successful transition into adulthood: “accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and [achieving] financial independence” (Inderbitzin, 2009:454). Although interventions and strategies may vary by individual need (Mann et al., 2007; Trulson et al., 2005) the literature shows that there is a pattern of common needs and issues faced by persistent youth offenders in North America. As recommended throughout the literature, “examining factors that explain persistence or desistance...(will) identify where efforts might best be placed to deal with these offenders” (Trulson et al., 2005:358). Osgood et al. (2005) advise that research be done to understand successful transitions and resilience to difficult circumstances in order to better adapt programs to those persistent youth offenders who are on the verge of their transition into adulthood.

3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

3.1 Background

The environmental scan utilized internet search engines, academic databases, and telephone contacts to establish the programs and services available for transition-aged persistent youth offenders in Canada and internationally. A number of programs included in the scan are aimed specifically at supporting youth who have been significantly involved in the justice system and are now transitioning into adulthood; these programs are referred to as “targeted programs.” Also included are relevant programs and services that are not specifically aimed at the population of interest, but are included as important and successful practices that address the needs of vulnerable and/or disadvantaged youth. These “general programs” do not focus primarily on youth offenders but do include them within their clientele. This was a non-exhaustive scan and includes only those programs that show promising practice in their area. Information collection took place between May and August 2011 and looked at programs and services in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

Where contact was established with program staff, a standardized set of questions was used to collect information about each program (see Appendix A). Program evaluations were reviewed when available. Representatives for the vast majority of programs included in this scan were contacted by telephone to discuss relevant information. Each program was labelled as a targeted or general program depending on the relevance of their program to transition-aged persistent youth offenders.

A table was used to summarize information about the programs, providing the following details:

- The age group of participants;
- Service type provided (specialized or wrap-around);
- Whether participation was voluntary or mandated;
- Primary funders of the program;
- Whether evaluation has been done on the program; and
- Any legislation that supports the program.

3.2 Targeted Programs

Table 3.1 provides a brief summary of the targeted programs found by the scan. The following sections provide descriptions of each program.

Table 3.1

Summary of Targeted Programs

Program Name/ Agency	Voluntary/ Mandatory	Funding	Age Group	Service Type	Evaluation	Legislation
C-STEP/John Howard Society of Newfoundland & Labrador	Both	Government of Newfoundland & Labrador	18-25	Wrap-around	No	N/A
Follow up & Attendance Centre/Elizabeth Fry Society of Peel/Halton	Mandatory	Ministry of Children and Youth Services	15-18/23	Wrap-around	No	N/A
"Inside the Walls"/YOU CAN	Voluntary	Corrections Canada/Ministry of Public Safety	18-26	Wrap-around	Yes	N/A
ISSO Initiative/City of Calgary CNS	Mandatory	City of Calgary/ Government of Alberta	15-24	Wrap-around	Yes	Youth Criminal Justice Act
Youthful Offender Transitions Program (YOTP)/Kalamazoo 9 th Circuit Court	Both	Kellogg Foundation	16-21	Wrap-around	No	N/A
T2A/St. Giles Trust	Voluntary	Borrow Cadbury Trust	15-25	Wrap-around	Yes	N/A
McMan Youth, Family and Community Services	Voluntary	Children's Services; City of Calgary; Alberta Solicitor General	12-24 Program Dependent	Wrap-around	No	N/A
Bladerunners	Voluntary	Service Canada; Government of B.C.; ACCESS	15-30	Wrap-around & Specialized	No	N/A
ISSP/PLEA Community Services Society of B.C.	Mandatory	Ministry of Children and Family Services	15-20	Wrap-around	No	Youth Criminal Justice Act

3.2.1 C-Step Program: John Howard Society of Newfoundland and Labrador¹

The C-Step Program offers youth services that involve cognitive restructuring and employment counselling for young adults aged 18-25. This holistic program aims to connect youth to various local agencies to meet their unique needs and address the barriers that prevent them from succeeding in employment. Each incoming youth is assisted by an employment counsellor to establish short- and long-term goals that they want to work toward, including completing school, obtaining identification, or getting a job. Counsellors generally meet with the young person two months before their release

¹ Information was provided from personal communication with a representative of the John Howard Society of Newfoundland and Labrador on June 29, 2011.

date and typically work with them for up to a year after release from custody. Funded primarily by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, C-Step works with non-employment insurance eligible youth who enter the program both voluntarily and as mandated by a probation order. C-Step prioritizes relapse prevention and stable housing before employment as they feel that youth cannot be successful in employment without first establishing some form of stability. Despite consideration for housing and other needs, C-Step is specifically an employment/employability-based program.

3.2.2 Follow-up Program/Attendance Centre: Elizabeth Fry Society of Peel/Halton, Ontario²

The Elizabeth Fry Follow-up Program and Attendance Centre works with a female only population; many of these clients come from marginalized communities and a high percentage of them are dealing with mental illness. Clients are typically mandated by a probation order to attend programming and although the age group is 15-18 years old, if a client enters the program while they are a youth they may continue with the program until they are 23 years of age. This division of the Elizabeth Fry Society is primarily funded by the Ministry of Child and Youth Services and offers over 43 different programs including social skills, conflict management, parenting, job search, and financial management. The programs that are offered to each client are based on the initial intake assessment to ensure that the youth receive information relevant to them. The Follow-up Program and Attendance Centre provides wrap-around services that aim to address the multiple barriers that impact transition-aged young women. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the program has achieved success, which is attributed to the individualized and specific programming available to meet each client's needs.

3.2.3 "Inside the Walls": YOUCAN, Ontario³

YOUCAN Ontario is currently in year three of a five-year pilot of the "Inside the Walls" project. Unique in its practice, "Inside the Walls" is funded by both the Correctional Service of Canada and the Ministry of Public Safety and operates within Collins Bay Institution in Kingston, Ontario. The overall aim of the program is to teach inmates how to effectively deal with conflict by providing conflict management training and conflict coaching to inmates aged 18-26. The program is separate from the Correctional Service of Canada and takes the inmates out of normal prison routines to provide them with a safe space to be open and honest. This unique approach is well received by the inmates and encourages success within the program. Each inmate completes a five-week program containing eight modules:

- 1) Cross-cultural conflict resolution;
- 2) Learning and applying negotiation skills;

² Information was provided from personal communication with a representative of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Peel/Halton, Ontario on July 11, 2011.

³ Information was provided in part from personal communication with a representative of YOUCAN Ontario on July 4, 2011.

- 3) Mediation to de-escalate conflict;
- 4) Facilitation (in conflict resolution);
- 5) Taking action (release planning);
- 6) Peer helping (relationship building);
- 7) Dialogue (vs. debate and discussion); and
- 8) Peace circles.

Upon completion of these modules each inmate receives a certificate and one university credit from St. Pauls University in Ottawa. In addition to working through conflict management issues, this voluntary program also assists inmates with pre-release planning, job search, obtaining identification, and Ontario Works applications. The wrap-around services of this program have been well received and have seen strong success. In the March/April 2011 group, 10 out of 15 inmates were successful in completing their modules. (Downey, 2011:1). One major challenge that results from running the program inside the institution is that when there is a lockdown within Collins Bay Institution all programming must stop. This delays and interrupts the success of some clients.

3.2.4 City of Calgary ISSO Initiative: Calgary, Alberta⁴

The Calgary Intensive Support and Supervision Order (ISSO) Initiative provides specialized and intensive support for severely at risk youth who are involved in the Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP) under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. This initiative is funded by both the City of Calgary and the Government of Alberta. Of the youth referred, the initiative accepts 15 youth at a time who are at the most risk and meet the eligibility criteria (City of Calgary Community & Neighbourhood Services, 2011):

- A minimum of five previous findings of guilt;
- Five or more findings of guilt for failing to comply with previous youth justice orders;
- A mental health diagnoses, or strong indicators of such;
- Minimal to no personal/professional support systems; and
- Minimal involvement in productive activities.

The ISSO is a community-based alternative to custodial sentences for young offenders. The Calgary ISSO Initiative works within this order to provide more intensive support and supervision than a regular probation order. The Youth and Family Support worker, in partnership with the probation officer, works one on one with the youth aged 15-24 to address individual needs and create unique plans for success. Much of the support given within this wrap-around program includes housing, accessing medical care, gaining life and job skills, obtaining identification, and learning about valuable resources within the community.

⁴ Information was provided in part from personal communication with a representative of the City of Calgary ISSO Initiative on June 27, 2011 and July 22, 2011.

The ISSO Initiative is seeing tremendous success; since its start in 2008, it has been found that more youth successfully complete their Intensive Support and Supervision Order when involved in the initiative than when they lack this support. In 2010, 83% of Calgary ISSO Initiative sentences closed successfully as opposed to 37% of non-supported Alberta ISSO sentences (Calgary ISSO Initiative, 2010).

3.2.5 Youthful Offender Transitions Program (YOTP): Kalamazoo, Michigan⁵

In operation since 2006, the YOTP works with youth aged 16-21 who have had prior court involvement or are currently aging out of the youth justice system. The program strives to help these young people achieve independence and have the ability to adopt a normal and positive role within their community. This program is unique to Kalamazoo and youth join the program both voluntarily and through probation orders. YOTP is a wrap-around program that addresses the diverse needs of transition aged youth offenders by providing support and services in many areas. Services address: mental health, employment, education, financial independence, basic life skills, and relationship building. Although no formal evaluation is available, statistics show that in the last five years of operation, 75% of involved youth had reached the goals they had set for themselves.

Funding for this program is provided by the Kellogg Foundation and is guaranteed until January 2013, at which time the success of the program and the resources available will be re-evaluated.

3.2.6 Transition 2 Adulthood (T2A): London, United Kingdom⁶

Borrow Cadbury Trust is currently funding a pilot program for youth aged 15-25 who are involved or at risk of becoming involved in the justice system. This is a voluntary wrap-around program that operates in three districts in the United Kingdom: London, Birmingham, and Worcestershire. However, only the London district program fits within the parameters of the current study. The support services typically last for 12 months and strive to help young adults progress into successful roles (Burnett & Hanley Santos, 2010). T2A helps young adults according to their individual action plan to ensure that youth are receiving the services needed. Support is often provided in the areas of housing, addressing mental health needs, education, employment, accessing benefits, and building relationships.

Employing ex-offenders as T2A workers and volunteer mentors is both a unique practice and one that has been met with positive feedback from the participants. Using ex-offenders as mentors to youth offenders proved to increase success of the program by demonstrating that success and a positive future are possible. Also attributed to the success of this program is the voluntary and relaxed nature of the programs and the

⁵ Information was provided from personal communication with a representative of the Youthful Offender Transitions Program on July 12, 2011.

⁶ Information was provided in part from personal communication with a representative of T2A on July 19, 2011.

strong relationships that are built between the worker and the client (Burnett & Hanley Santos, 2010).

Funding for this pilot project is guaranteed by Borrow Cadbury Trust until March 2012 at which time alternate funding must be found if the program is to continue. The objective for this Trust is to highlight the need for the development of programs that are targeted directly toward transition-aged youth as this is a distinct area of need, especially for those involved in the justice system.

3.2.7 McMan Youth, Family, and Community Services: Calgary, Alberta⁷

McMan is a wrap-around agency that has multiple programs aimed at different at risk and vulnerable populations. With six relevant programs for transition-aged youth offenders, the overall objective of the agency is to aid the youth in achieving a healthy and successful reintegration back into the community. Programming has been running within McMan for approximately 12 years and new programs have been established to meet the needs of their clientele. The following are voluntary programs that are offered through McMan Youth, Family, and Community Services that fit within the parameters of the study:⁸

- **“Triwood Place” Affordable Housing Apartment:** This is a program for youth aged 18-24 who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. The youth must be working or attending school and must be committed to their own success. Funding is provided by the Government of Alberta.
- **Supported Independent Living/Youth Transitions to Adulthood:** This program is dedicated to helping youth aged 16-18 (or 22 if granted an extension) obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to live independently. Programming includes education, employment, and life/living skills training. Funding is provided by Calgary and Area Child and Family Services.
- **Wrap Around (CYOC) Program:** This is a mentorship program developed for youth who are preparing to leave custody and return back into the community. Funded by the Alberta Solicitor General, this program works with youth aged 12-18 (or 22 if granted an extension).
- **High Fidelity Wraparound:** Funded by Calgary and Area Child and Family Services, this program supports youth aged 12-18 (or 22 if granted an extension) and their families achieve common goals and build on the young person’s strengths in positive areas.
- **Wellington Place:** As a relatively new program, Wellington Place is funded by the Calgary Homeless Foundation and the United Way of Calgary. This program

⁷ Information was provided in part from personal communication with a representative of McMan Youth, Family, and Community Services of Calgary on July 25, 2011.

⁸ Information in the following sections was taken from http://www.mcman.ca/html/regions_calgary.htm, accessed July 20, 2011.

works with youth aged 16-21 and provides support with education and employment to youth struggling with homelessness.

- **Hope Homes and Hope Homes for Aboriginal Youth:** This program is targeted toward youth who are committed to making positive choices in their life. Funded by the United Way of Calgary and the Calgary Homeless Foundation, Hope Homes provides independent living and room and board accommodations to youth aged 16-24 who are in the process of completing high school and are at risk of homelessness or who are homeless.

Each of the accommodation programs also requires the young person to contribute to paying rent. While this is a subsidized/reduced amount, the rent that the youth pay is also used as funding for McMan accommodation and housing programs.

3.2.8 BladeRunners: British Columbia⁹

BladeRunners is a voluntary program operating in multiple regions of British Columbia that strives to provide at risk youth aged 15-30 (19-30 in some regions) with job training and skills to achieve successful employment. BladeRunners receives funding from multiple agencies but is primarily funded by the Government of B.C., ACCESS, and Service Canada. Each youth involved in the program goes through a training program focused around job readiness. Components of the training program include:

- Life Skills: work ethic, communication, health and wellness, financial and anger management, etc.;
- Job readiness skills;
- Certified courses: WHIMIS, First-Aid, WCB Awareness, equipment (forklift) training, etc.; and
- On-the-job support for up to 18 months.

Other assistance may include providing referrals for shelter, bus, and public transit tickets, and basic work and safety equipment. Many youth involved in this program are also supported in pursuing an apprenticeship in a trade. In operation since 1994, BladeRunners has seen many youth go on to have successful careers and continue making positive choices in other aspects of their lives.

⁹ Information in this section was taken from <http://www.bladerunners.info/aboutus.htm>, accessed August 2, 2011.

3.2.9 Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP), PLEA Community Services Society of B.C.: British Columbia, Canada¹⁰

ISSP is a wrap-around program that started in 2004 and is contracted by the Government of B.C. as a supplement to the provincial government's ISSP. Funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Services, ISSP works with youth aged 15-20 who are living in the community and on a youth justice order. ISSP works toward reintegrating youth into the community with access to resources and positive mentorship. Youth are referred into this program by probation officers as a mandated condition of their youth order. Each youth must attend counselling, school and/or their job as part of the service plans that are created to meet the needs of each youth.

3.3 General Programs

Table 3.2 provides a brief summary of the general programs found by the scan. The following sections provide descriptions of each program.

3.3.1 Job Smart: City of Calgary Youth Employment Centre, Calgary, Alberta¹¹

Job Smart is a program run through the City of Calgary Youth Employment Centre that works with youth aged 15-24. Funded by the City of Calgary, this pilot program started in 2010 and has since seen success in their clients sustaining employment and building a résumé and job skills. Youth are referred into this program by probation officers and youth employment counsellors but participation is voluntary. Unlike other voluntary programs, Job Smart is not able to provide incentives (monetary or other) for the youth to attend the program; this results in poor continuous involvement as many youth have no income while attending the program (City of Calgary Youth Employment Centre, 2011). This program specializes in employment-related activities, including: résumé writing, completing education, job search, interview preparation, and personal banking.

¹⁰ Information was provided from personal communication with a representative of PLEA Community Services on July 5, 2011.

¹¹ Information was provided in part from personal communication with a representative of JobSmart on July 11, 2011.

Table 3.2

Summary of General Programs

Program Name/ Agency	Voluntary/ Mandatory	Funding	Age Group	Service Type	Evaluation	Legislation
Job Smart/City of Calgary Youth Employment Centre	Voluntary	City of Calgary	15-18+	Specialized	Yes	N/A
PLEA Community Service Society of B.C.	Mandatory	Ministry of Children and Family Services	13-20 Program Dependent	Both	No	N/A
Youth Custody ISSP/ Government of B.C.	Mandatory	Government of British Columbia	12-18	Wrap- around	No	Youth Criminal Justice Act
Ge-Da-Gi Binez Youth Centre	Mandatory	Ministry of Children and Youth Services	12-18	Wrap- around	No	Youth Criminal Justice Act
Behind the Walls/Goodwill Industries	Voluntary	Goodwill Industries International	20-50+	Specialized	No	Second Chance Act & Federal Bonding Program
IIS & Clinical Supports/Center for Children and Families in the Justice System	Mandatory	Ministry of Children and Youth Services	12-18	Specialized	No	N/A
Marist Youth Care: Australia	Both	Unknown	11-25 Program Dependent	Both	No	N/A
Working Together & Employment Beginnings Program/Pathfinders	Voluntary	Service Canada	15-30	Specialized	No	N/A
Surrey Youth Independent Housing/Options	Voluntary	Vancouver Foundation	16-24	Specialized	No	N/A

3.3.2 PLEA Community Services Society of B.C.: British Columbia¹²

Funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Services, PLEA operates two separate programs that are relevant to the current study:

- **Creative Urban Employment (CUE):** This 26-week program aims to help youth gain valuable employment skills and training that may lead to a more successful and independent future. Youth aged 16-19 learn skills such as: résumé writing,

¹² Information was provided from personal communication with a representative of PLEA Community Services on July 5, 2011.

obtaining identification, job search, and obtaining and maintaining employment. This program is not voluntary and youth are referred to CUE by their probation officer. By the end of the program all youth will have received training in skills such as workplace hazardous material safety, food safety, fork lift operation, and first aid (among others). Unique to this specialized program is wage subsidies for the businesses that hire these young people. CUE will subsidize wages of up to \$10 per hour for the first 10 weeks of employment and \$3 per hour for the remaining 16 weeks. Funding for necessary work items (e.g., clothes, work boots, etc.) is also provided. Success of this program has been demonstrated in the 40 out of 45 participants who obtained employment last year.

- **Dare Attendance Program/Short Term Respite Services:** This program serves as an alternative to sentencing for youth who are awaiting their sentence. The youth in this program, aged 13-18, are placed in the community with host families. These families receive funding for the expenses of raising the youth and the young person has the opportunity to remain in their school and establish positive relationships in real home environments. This is also a mandatory program for those youth who are referred to it by their probation officers. This program is operated with the hope that youth will be able to transition into independent living or another assisted living arrangement.

3.3.3 Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP): British Columbia¹³

Based on the ISSO (Intensive Support and Supervision Order) as mandated by the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, the B.C. ISSP is a wrap-around program funded by the Government of British Columbia that aims to reduce recidivism in young offenders. The program caters to youth aged 12-18, or up to 19 years old if they are still on a youth probation order, and works with them to help meet their individual needs. Finishing school, résumé building, obtaining identification, transitional housing, and parent/child mediation are a few of the services that are provided to youth involved in this program. This is a mandatory program referred to youth on ISSOs.

3.3.4 Ge-Da-Gi-Binez Youth Centre: Ontario¹⁴

This aboriginal youth detention center is funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and focuses on traditional aboriginal teachings to aid in a healthy reintegration back into the community. Using traditional programming (e.g., sweat lodges, naming ceremonies, and sharing/healing/talking circles) this young offender centre provides wrap-around services that address anger management, substance abuse, and life and job skills. In addition, a reintegration worker works closely with the youth and their families and community to facilitate a healthy transition after release from custody.

¹³ Information was provided from personal communication with a representative of ISSP at the Burnaby Youth Custody Centre in B.C. on July 7, 2011.

¹⁴ Information was provided from personal communication with a representative of Ge-Da-Gi-Binez Youth Centre on July 22, 2011.

3.3.5 1-Stop Behind the Walls: Goodwill Industries, Virginia¹⁵

This voluntary and specialized program is run through the Goodwill agencies of Virginia in partnership with a level two institution which houses various types of offenders. This pilot program started in 2010 and is working toward helping offenders find and sustain gainful employment and to encourage a reduction in recidivism. Working with men aged 20 to late 50s, this program is clearly not developed for transitioning youth: however, it does include programming that is intended to help young adults in a healthy reintegration and learn life and job skills that are lacking for many offenders. Sessions included within this program are: behaviour readjustment, acceptance/ownership of crime, job search, retention, interpersonal/life skills, and personal banking. 1-Stop works with offenders who show motivation and dedication to their own success for 12-24 months pre-release. Due to the short time that this program has been running, no evaluation has been done. However all three of the offenders that have been released from the program have employment.

Goodwill Industries uses the opportunities created by United States Federal law to the advantage of their programs. The Second Chance Act was signed into law in 2008 and allows for funding to be provided to re-entry programming, such as those provided by Goodwill. The Federal Bonding Program allows employers to purchase bond insurance for employing at risk employees. Because Goodwill provides work to many ex-offenders, this program, as well as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, is beneficial. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit provides a tax incentive for employers to hire and train workers who have criminal backgrounds. These federal programs are essential for those with criminal backgrounds to find gainful employment and strive for success (Goodwill Industries, 2011).

3.3.6 Intensive Intervention Services (IIS)/Clinical Supports Program: London, Ontario¹⁶

Operating since 2009, these programs are contracted and funded by the Ministry of Child and Youth Services. Both programs specialize in working with transitioning youth aged 12-18 who struggle with mental health issues. However, while I.I.S. works with youth who have been released from custody and are on a probation order, the Clinical Supports Program works with youth while they are still in custody or residential facilities. Both programs offer counselling, psychiatric, and psychological services, with the Clinical Supports Program also providing nursing services. These mandatory programs have seen great success, which they attribute in part to their partnership with probation and their ability to provide continuity of care.

¹⁵ Information was provided in part from personal communication with a representative from the 1-Stop Behind the Walls program on July 5, 2011.

¹⁶ Information was provided from personal communication with a representative from the IIS/Clinical Supports Program on July 14, 2011.

3.3.7 Marist Youth Care: New South Wales, Australia¹⁷

Marist Youth Care has a number of programs that address the needs and issues that are common among many transition-aged persistent youth offenders. While these programs are not intended specifically for persistent youth offenders, these youth are welcome to become involved. The programs relevant to the current study are:

- **Skills 4 Life:** This is an independent living program designed to help young people learn the skills necessary for independent living. With short-term (6 months) and long-term (12 months) accommodation programs, youth are helped with relationship building, school/employment support, and search for long-term accommodation.
- **Transition to Independent Living Program (TILP):** This 12-month program provides subsidized and supported accommodation to youth aged 16-25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Each youth works directly with a case worker who helps them address their issues and supports them to become independent and self-sufficient in the future.
- **Nepean Youth Homelessness Service (NYHS):** Funded by Community Services under the Homeless Action Plan, this program is also designed for youth who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness. There are three divisions of this program offered to meet specific needs: High Needs Youth (aged 16-25); Early Intervention Support (aged 12-18); and Post Crisis Support (aged 18-25).
- **Nepean Youth Brokerage Service:** Similar to the other programs offered by Marist, this program supports youth aged 12-25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness where alcohol or drug abuse is also an issue. Youth involved in this program receive brokerage money to assist them in transitioning into independent living and self-sufficiency.
- **Post Release Support Program:** This three-month program is designed to support youth who have been released from custody but who are at risk of returning. The aim of the program is to teach youth how to access resources and to foster a healthy reintegration into their communities and families.

3.3.8 Pathfinders: British Columbia¹⁸

Funded by Service Canada, Pathfinders offers two employability programs that deal with youth aged 15-30 who are faced with a number of barriers to success. These are voluntary and specific programs that aim to teach young people the skills necessary to have a successful and independent future. Youth must apply for acceptance into the

¹⁷ Information was taken from <http://www.maristyc.com.au/MYC/> on June 22, 2011.

¹⁸ Information was provided in part from personal communication with a representative from Pathfinders on July 26, 2011.

programs and must be successful in four interviews. Successful youth are paid minimum wage throughout programming and training, and partake in follow-up sessions three months after their graduation from the program. The two programs have seen high levels of success in their graduates. Pathfinders' programs are detailed as follows:

- **Employment Beginnings Program:** This is a 22-week program that focuses on the hospitality and tourism industry in B.C. This program provides life skills, employment skills, and certification training. Youth also complete 12 weeks of work experience where \$5 of their hourly wage is subsidized by Pathfinders.
- **Working Together:** This is a 28-week community service youth skills program that teaches youth life skills, employment skills, and certification training.

3.3.9 Surrey Youth Independent Housing (SYIH), Options: British Columbia, Canada¹⁹

In partnership with B.C. Housing, SYIH is at the beginning stages of its three-year pilot project funded by the Vancouver Foundation. This program works with youth aged 16-24 to reduce homelessness and address the independent issues that lead to homelessness, including mental illness and criminal involvement. This is a voluntary program that includes mandatory life skills and independent living workshops. Youth who are employed are required to put 30% of their income to rent; the rest comes from welfare and subsidies provided by B.C. Housing. Youth stay involved in the program for up to one year with one-on-one support. Due to the length of involvement and the short time that the program has been running, no findings of success or needed improvement have been found to date.

3.4 Summary

Although many programs and services are available for transition-aged vulnerable youth, too few of them focus specifically on persistent youth offenders who have essentially grown up in the justice system and lack the skills and knowledge to have a healthy and successful transition into adulthood. Due to the fact that many of the programs listed above have not been evaluated, it is difficult to compare their success to establish best practice. In addition to this, the representatives who spoke of great success within their programs also noted that the measurements of "success" are different for each youth. While some youth may meet the requirements of the program and be "successful," another may fail the requirements but overcome a seemingly marginal barrier and also be deemed "successful." There are many programs that address the issues of employment and housing, but more attention needs to be paid to wrap-around services or programs that focus on other issues such as substance abuse, lack of education, and re-establishing positive relationships.

¹⁹ Information was provided from personal communication with a representative from Options on July 27, 2011.

4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this report was to examine best practice in supporting persistent youth offenders in their transition to adulthood. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- (1) Establish the risk factors present among persistent youth offenders during their transition to adulthood;
- (2) Establish the specific needs of persistent youth offenders as they transition into adulthood; and
- (3) Determine best practice in supporting persistent youth offenders as they transition to adulthood.

In order to meet these objectives, two methodologies were used. First, a literature review was conducted to establish the risk factors present among persistent youth offenders in their transition to adulthood, as well as their specific needs during this time. This included an examination of youth offenders who are dealing with multiple other barriers to success such as poverty, mental health issues, and substance abuse. Second, an environmental scan was conducted to identify promising and relevant programs and services in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia that deal directly with persistent youth offenders and their diverse needs as they transition to adulthood. The following section discusses the major findings of the research.

4.1 Discussion

The data collected were used to address the following research questions:

- (1) What are some of the specific risk factors present among persistent youth offenders as they transition from youth to adulthood, as identified in the literature (e.g., poverty, mental health, education, employment, addiction, etc.)?
- (2) What specific needs have been identified for transition-aged persistent youth offenders?
- (3) What programs and services are available in Alberta, Canada, and internationally to support persistent youth offenders in the transition to adulthood?
- (4) What best practices have been identified from evaluations of these programs?

The transition into adulthood is a challenging time for all adolescents and is especially difficult for those youth who do not benefit from a positive and supportive environment. As Uggen and Wakefield (2005) explain, youth who have been involved in the criminal justice system and lack support are more likely to face a “cumulative

disadvantage” due to additional challenges such as poverty, homelessness, mental illness, and substance abuse.

Risk factors for persistent youth offenders can be categorized into five domains: community, family, individual, school (employment), and peer. As shown throughout the literature, factors in each of these domains must be addressed in order for persistent youth offenders to be fully supported during their transition and their needs to be met. Inderbitzin (2009) and Uggen and Wakefield (2005) argue that risk factors in one of these domains tend to impact or cause issues within other domains. For example, coming from or returning to a disorganized neighborhood with high rates of poverty and crime not only increases the likelihood of recidivism, but also leads to a lack of education, and thus, impacts occupational attainment (Uggen & Wakefield, 2005).

Altschuler (2005) adds family and social involvement to the list of important risk factors that must be addressed for these youth offenders. He states that problems within the family can often lead to poor youth development – an issue which can also impact education, employment, and eventually, income. Inderbitzin (2009), Cuzick et al. (2011), and Osgood et al. (2005) also emphasize that mental illness, lack of positive relationships, and poor socioeconomic backgrounds must be addressed, and suggest that promising support programs should include elements to address all of these diverse issues.

The needs of the persistent youth offender stem directly from the common risk factors discussed above. Reid and Dudding (2006) have established eight key areas in which youth need support in order to achieve success, with the foundation being financial support: without this foundation, many needs would be more difficult or nearly impossible to address. Once financial support is achieved as a foundation, promising programs should aim to support youth in areas of education, housing, life skills, identity, youth engagement, emotional healing, and relationships. Ideally, programs that address these areas would best support the persistent youth offender to be successful.

The environmental scan identified 18 programs and services that are available for persistent youth offenders as they transition into adulthood. Nine of these programs were labeled as targeted programs – programs that directly target this population. Eight targeted programs were classified as wrap-around services and one program offered both wrap-around and specialized services. Another nine programs were listed as general programs – programs that were not necessarily designated for youth offenders, but address the risk factors they experience. Five of these programs offered specialized services, two offered wrap-around services, and two offered both service types. The majority of programs (14 in total) were found in Canada, however, there were also two American programs, one Australian program, and one in the United Kingdom. These programs were included within the scan because they address all or some of the issues and needs identified in the literature review.

Program evaluations aid in establishing best practice as they provide evidence that the program is successful in its implementation and outcomes. The evaluations

available for the City of Calgary ISSO Initiative, the “Inside the Walls” YOUCAN project, and the Transition 2 Adulthood (T2A) trust program provided evidence of each programs’ success. Each of these programs provides wrap-around services to youth offenders and focus on the individual needs of each young person. These programs have demonstrated success by the high number of youth who are able to successfully complete the programming and come closer to achieving their individual goals. The City of Calgary ISSO Initiative, the “Inside the Walls” YOUCAN project, and the T2A trust program assist youth in obtaining the proper life skills and education to achieve individual success. In addition, the ISSO Initiative and the T2A program both focus intensively on ensuring continuity of care and the coordination of services to help youth meet their long-term needs.

Of the remaining programs found by the environmental scan, few have conducted program evaluations, making it difficult to definitively conclude that they demonstrate best practice. However, based on the information provided by the literature review, some programs show promising practice by addressing the issues and needs faced by persistent youth offenders.

Continuity of care and coordination of services have been identified as important for persistent youth offenders as they transition into adulthood. While continuity of care is a common characteristic among many of the targeted programs in this study, the Youthful Offender Transition Program (YOTP) and the Elizabeth Fry Follow-up and Attendance Centre are two programs that also cater their services to a range of risk factors. These programs address a diverse set of risk factors, including mental health, life and job skills, and meaningful employment. The individual programming that is created to address the unique needs and barriers of the young person is an important practice that both of these programs employ.

As described in the literature review, risk factors within one domain of a young persons’ life can cause or impact issues in other domains (Uggen & Wakefield, 2005). Due to this “chain reaction,” programs that address the underlying risk factors surrounding basic needs may be identified as promising practices. The John Howard Society’s C-STEP program and McMan Youth, Family and Community Services have both established holistic programs that focus not only on employment and independent living, but also on the issues that have previously prevented success in these areas. The case-by-case method used by these programs to help persistent youth offenders contributes to the longevity of their success during and after their transition to adulthood.

Social inclusion and recognition of culturally specific barriers and solutions have also been identified as important practices in managing the transition to adulthood for persistent youth offenders. The Ge-Da-Gi-Binez Youth Centre focuses on traditional aboriginal teachings to address specific issues and encourage positive reintegration and transition after release from custody. This culturally specific program demonstrates promising practice by providing wrap-around services that are tailored to meet the needs of its target population.

The literature suggests that promising practices would address each of the five risk factor domains (community, family, individual, school/employment, and peer) within their programming. Marist Youth Care in Australia comes close to addressing needs within each domain with the wide variety of services available. Programs at Marist focus on employment, housing, addictions, family integration/support, and provide continuity of care throughout the transition. This continuous, coordinated range of service is vital to successful transition.

While many of the programs included in the environmental scan are relevant to the current study and do address some of the needs and issues faced by youth offenders, too few of them offer wrap-around services and some only work with youth until they turn 18. Because this time of transition is accompanied by many challenges, and because many youth are dealing with complex issues without the continued support of government services, it is important for programs to address all needs and to provide continuous support well into adulthood.

A few additional issues can be identified in relation to the programs available to the population in this study. While many programs cater to at-risk populations, few of them were established specifically for persistent youth offenders as they transition into adulthood. Given the unique challenges that define this population, targeted programs are necessary to provide the support needed. The environmental scan did find programs that were newly created for this population, however, their lack of evaluations proved to hinder the determination of best practice.

4.2 Conclusion

As evident within the literature review and the program evaluations available, best practices must employ a holistic approach to address all needs and issues faced by a persistent youth offender. Programs that neglect an area of need are not likely to see sustained achievement in the youth they work with because of the impact one issue may have on many others. Programs that demonstrate continuity of care have shown success and promise as they help instill stability and long-term support through the transition to adulthood. However, future research should look at the effectiveness of these promising programs as many of them are currently in their initial stages and have not conducted evaluations to measure their success.

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APPENDIX A
ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN QUESTIONS

Name: _____

Agency: _____

City (location) _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Follow-up: _____

Environmental Scan Questions

1. **Name** of Program/ Support: _____

2. **How long** has the program been in effect? _____
3. Is this an “**in- house**” program **or** is it **contracted** out to other agencies? _____

4. What are the **objectives/ goals** of the program? _____

5. What **services** are included within the program? (ie: life skills, job skills, education, housing, etc.) _____

6. What **age groups** does the program cater to? _____
7. Are there any programs that are targeted at a **specific population**? (ie: Aboriginal, ethnic minorities, female/male only, etc.) _____

8. How is the program **funded**? _____

9. How many **divisions** of this program are there? (does it just operate in your city or is it national, international, etc.) _____

10. What are the proposed or suspected **outcomes** of the program? _____

11. Has there been a formal **evaluation** of the program? _____

a. **When** was the evaluation? _____

b. **What** was the outcome? _____

c. Is it possible to get a **copy** of the evaluation report? _____

12. Additional Information: _____

13. Alternate Contacts/ Referrals: _____

Follow up Information: _____

